I ♥ NY

Why Wayfinding?

New York is a walking city. Thirty one percent of all trips in the city are made by foot. In addition, most subway and bus trips begin and end on foot. Despite the large number of people walking, New York does not have a coherent information system, also known as "wayfinding", for pedestrians. The absence of such a system is more pronounced in the midst of some of the City's recent initiatives to improve the pedestrian environment by creating plazas, widening sidewalks and installing modern bus stop shelters and newsstands.

A well-designed wayfinding system will encourage walking trips, thus reducing the burden on the City's overcrowded transit system and reducing traffic congestion from taxis. Furthermore, wayfinding will put more pedestrians on commercial streets, benefitting the local economy. Finally, wayfinding will contribute to more active lifestyles.

The new wayfinding Request for Proposals will create a standardized pedestrian wayfinding system, for eventual installation citywide.

KNOWLEDGE > CONFIDENCE > WALKING

Finding the best walking route from A to B requires pedestrian information. Wayfinding systems identity connector streets and provide support signage.

Directional signage

Map and walking radius

In-ground compass

Images for illustrative purposes only.

Many Find NYC Confusing

27%

of visitors admitted to getting lost in the previous week

9%

of New Yorkers have been lost in the past week

27%

of visitors can't name the borough they are in

24%

of visitors did not know how to get to their next destination

33%

of locals could not identify which direction was north

To understand people's perceptions of walking in the city, an intercept survey of over 500 pedestrians was conducted. One hundred interviews were conducted in each of the following neighborhoods:
1. Central Harlem
2. Fashion District
3. Chinatown
4. Coney Island
5. Long Island City

KNOWLEDGE (OR LACK OF IT)

People were asked "How familiar are you with this area?" Those who live or work in New York City tended to answer "very familiar" or "somewhat familiar." Unsurprisingly, fewer than half of visitors had this same level of familiarity. However, when questioned about the locations of local destinations such as subway stations, bus stops and local landmarks, many of those who claimed to be familiar could not give directions or point them out. This suggests that people overestimate their understanding of the city.

Many visitors could not even name the neighborhood or borough in which they were standing. Fourteen percent of visitors failed to name the neighborhood while 27% could not name the borough. Further, a quarter of visitors did not know how to get to the next destination on their journey. Of these, almost half were planning to get to their destination on foot, despite being unsure which way to go.

GETTING LOST

Many people admitted to having been lost in the previous week. Over a quarter of visitors and one in 11 New Yorkers (9%) admitted to having been lost in the week prior to being surveyed. Furthermore, the survey showed that a third of locals and over half of visitors could not point north, thereby increasing their chances of becoming lost.

The City Can Be Difficult to Navigate

The grid structure is the dominant street layout in all five boroughs. This presents both advantages and disadvantages for wayfinding. Grid layouts are easy to navigate where streets are numbered and named sequentially. Particularly where names are non-sequential, knowledge of a cardinal direction or major area such as Downtown will enable people to attempt most journeys on foot. In locations where a predictable grid breaks down, as it does south of Houston or in the West Village in Manhattan, the change can be very confusing. Compounding the problem of the sometimes-confusing street grid, there is no consistent, easily recognizable element that provides information when traversing the city. To the extent that wayfinding exists, it has been provided on an ad-hoc basis by the city's Business Improvement Districts.
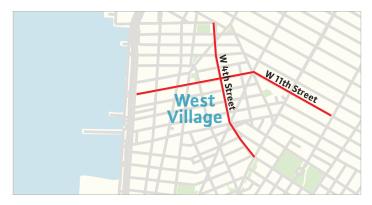
DEFINITION OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Research into how and where areas are represented shows great variety in the name and locations of New York's neighborhoods. Each color represents the name and location of the neighborhoods as they appear on different maps.

STREET NAMING

Queens can particularly confound a pedestrian trying to find an address on 30th Road, as there also exists 30th Avenue and 30th Drive. Looking for 30th Street? That's in another neighborhood of Queens.
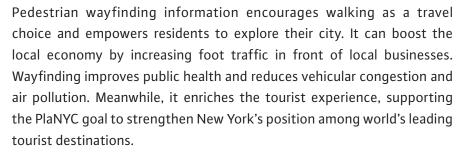

BREAKDOWN OF GRID STRUCTURE

Many visitors and residents pride themselves on understanding the Manhattan street grid. However, even the most seasoned New Yorkers are bewildered at the intersection of West 4th Street and West 11th Street.

Benefits of Wayfinding

Pedestrian wayfinding information encourages walking as a travel choice and empowers residents to explore their city. It can boost the local economy by increasing foot traffic in front of local businesses. Wayfinding improves public health and reduces vehicular congestion and air pollution. Meanwhile, it enriches the tourist experience, supporting the PlaNYC goal to strengthen New York's position among world's leading tourist destinations.
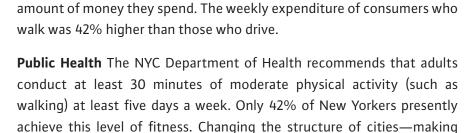
Exploration By increasing people's real knowledge of New York City, wayfinding can encourage residents to explore their city—revealing hidden shopping streets, local attractions, parks and walking routes.

Spending & Real Estate Research in the UK found a direct relationship between the way in which people travel around city centers and the amount of money they spend. The weekly expenditure of consumers who walk was 42% higher than those who drive.

Public Health The NYC Department of Health recommends that adults conduct at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (such as walking) at least five days a week. Only 42% of New Yorkers presently achieve this level of fitness. Changing the structure of cities—making places walkable—helps people achieve this amount of exercise.

Tourism Tourism is a major New York industry. The city's 49 million visitors account for $31 billion in direct spending and Mayor Bloomberg has set an ambitious goal to increase annual tourism to 60 million visitors by 2030. Wayfinding can play its part by revealing all the city's benefits to visitors.

Images for illustrative purposes only.